

CARSUS



BIG BAD

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TERROR AMONG THE TREES

“ EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT BY BARNABY BRUNWALD, FARMER ”

I was just a lad the first time I saw an infestation of brown hats—they can eat everything you own in just a few days.

We drove them off, but they kept coming back. If you catch one of the young ones, you can burn them out, but full-sized, fire just doesn't seem to phase them. You gotta pour acid on the buggers to really get them gone. We've still got some acid out in the shed if they ever come back.

I made the mistake of trying to stop the vermin horde at its source, and what I found terrified me. The tree those creatures sprouted from spoke directly to my mind. I still have nightmares.

CARSUS, TYRANT OF THE FOREST

Carsus is a brown hat tree—an evil plant who greedily insists on control of his grove. As an elder of the brown hats he has tyrannically reigned over his forest for hundreds of years, manipulating the land around him to his own benefit. Throughout the centuries the crafty tree has built a network of servants, both willing and unwilling, and taken great pains to ensure none of his offspring grow large enough to challenge his authority. Carsus's tight grip on his grove has started to fade—he is afflicted by the deadly fungal infection mage's bane, and there's no cure in sight.

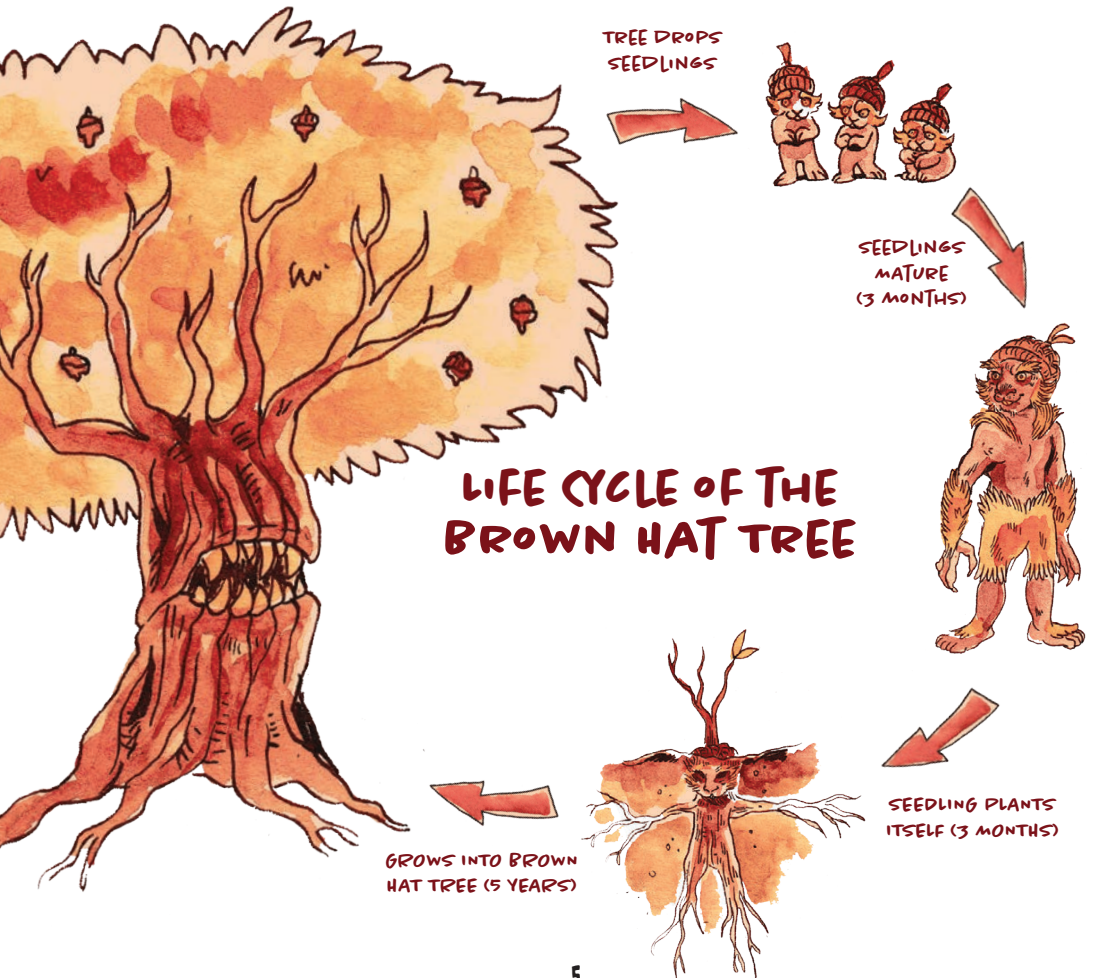
Tyrants of the Forest. Brown hat trees are viewed as the natural enemies of treants, and the two have fought long wars against one another. Brown hat trees have an often insatiable hunger and prefer cultivated fruits and vegetables, posing a major threat to nearby farms. If they cannot acquire such food, they will use their offspring to hunt.

Carsus used to eat in moderation and maintain “arrangements” with growers to help keep his food in steady supply. One such deal was with a village of halflings: in exchange for the majority of their apple crop, he wouldn't raze their settlement. However, he recently broke his word by slaughtering the entire village when they could offer no relief from the infection he is fighting.

Life Cycle of the Brown Hat Tree. When brown hat seedlings first fall from a branch they are tiny, no larger than an acorn. The tops of their heads resemble brown knit caps. Adolescent brown hats have sharp teeth, red-brown fur, and range from two to three feet tall. The adolescents eat voraciously until they grow large enough to take root. As adult trees their fur hardens into bark, their teeth multiply, and they dominate the surrounding territory via telepathic control of their spawn. Due to discord among brown hats as a race, full fledged adults are a rarity. Those that do grow into adult trees are effectively immortal.

Typically, individual brown hat trees avoid communicating and collaborating with one another, due to the vast amount of resources each grove requires and the violence that proximity often inspires. Some years ago, a trio of elder brown hats tried to unite their territories and form one large cooperative grove, but they fell to infighting and eventually created a devastating war that nearly wiped out the entire race. Since then brown hat groves remain insular, and elder trees are cautious when it comes to the creation and control of their spawn.

Preoccupied by the burgeoning fungus and an unending quest for food, Carsus has created more spawn than he is comfortable with. A few spawn have even gotten far enough away to take root on their own, and their independence infuriates him. On some level, though, he hopes that at least one survives into adulthood to ensure some form of a legacy after he dies.



ROLEPLAYING CARSUS

Carsus is dying. He is nearly 800 years old and infected with the incurable fungus called Mage's Bane. In an effort to stave off the fungus he is eating profusely, and he's had to drop hundreds of seedlings to scavenge more food for him. Before the infection diminished his power, he was a force to be reckoned with. He is now a shadow of what he used to be.

Brown hat trees tend to be aggressive and vicious by nature. Due to his illness, Carsus is even more ornery than normal. Refusing to speak aloud, he uses his telepathy like a whip, striking out at those around him in fits of rage. His telepathic voice is jabbing and deep. When he does speak aloud, the sound is as abrasive as cracking wood.

While Carsus is never kind, he can empathize with anyone afflicted by an illness. Carsus might be convinced to use some of his waning power to help someone else, but only if he believes the action will also benefit him.

Too prideful to ask for help, Carsus will lie to get what he wants. He's not a good liar, though, and often resorts to bullying instead. Clearing out the fungus is the only thing he cares about.

Carsus's pride in his appearance has been severely diminished, as a sickening fungus has turned his once-proud bark sawlow. Any comments about the unsightly infection will send the vain brown hat tree into a rage.

CARSUS' TACTICS

As a powerful telepath, Carsus invades the dreams of those who sleep in his forest, pushing them to exhaustion so they're easier to manipulate. He'll do this for as many days as he can, attempting to herd adventurers away from his grove while making them more and more exhausted from nightmares. In direct combat, Carsus uses a mix of spells and minions to keep attackers from getting into melee range, focusing on area effects that hit as many targets as possible. Usually he starts with *call lightning*, *wall of fire*, and *wall of stone*. To protect himself, he's willing to sacrifice his minions.

CARSUS' TRAITS

Ideal. "Obtaining a cure for this fungus is worth any sacrifice."

Bond. "Nothing is as grand as I, but those who serve me deserve their share. At least until I eat them."

Flaw. "My own selfishness makes it difficult for me to believe anyone would help me without wanting something in return."

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Carsus in your campaign.

Oaken Infestation. A large infestation of brown hats has ravaged two towns, and their citizens flee to nearby cities.

Helping the Villainous Tree. In an effort to cure his spreading fungus, Carsus sends his spawn to find a remedy. One such spawn encounters the adventuring party and asks for their assistance.

Bringing the Forest Down with Him. Carsus is confident he is going to die. He discovered the fungus he is infected by can spread to other trees and even humanoids. Now he's vengefully producing and deploying as many tainted brown hats as possible, to infect everyone and anything he can.

THE GROVE OF CARsus

Carsus is one of the oldest brown hat trees in existence, and his grove is in a deep wood. Treants used to make the forest their home, but Carsus drove them away. Animals of all kinds give the massive brown hat tree a wide berth. Over the centuries Carsus has carefully cultivated his grove so that he can grow as tall and strong as possible to defend himself, if required. Carsus psychically controls his brown hat spawn and sends them out to collect food from distant farms and villages.

LAIR ACTIONS

Carsus's meticulously maintained grove provides him access to several lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Carsus can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. He can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- Carsus casts *entangle* as a 5th-level spell against all creatures within 180 feet of him.
- Any creature within 30 feet of Carsus must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to take a full move action away from him.
- Carsus releases 1d10 brown hats or a single brown hat swarm. These creatures make attacks immediately and otherwise count as normal brown hats.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The region containing Carsus has become corrupted by the tree's evil presence:

- Animals are very skittish around Carsus, and the presence of small creatures tends to be sparse. Any attempt to *speak with animals* requires a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to convince the animal to talk.
- A brown hat tree can sense the presence of intelligent creatures up to 1 mile from its grove. Carsus will send his brown hat spawn out to determine if the intruders are edible.
- Carsus can inflict horrible nightmares on any creature that is within 5 miles of his grove. Anyone that takes a long rest within 5 miles of Carsus must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 1d10 psychic damage, suffer one level of exhaustion, and become unable to regain arcane spells for the next 24 hours.





"MAGE'S BANE", FUNGAL INFECTION

This potent fungus, known as "Mage's Bane," is a slow-growing infection that brown hat trees cannot feel, which makes it difficult for them to treat the disease when it's still in the early stages. Most brown hats become infected via their spawn devouring small portions of the fungus while foraging. The fungus has a natural immunity to magic, which makes it nearly impossible to cleanse the infected brown hat using magical means. Mage's Bane kills most brown hat trees within two to five years of infection; regular use of magic by the infected speeds up the process, killing frequent magic-users within a year.

Mage's Bane has an initial benefit for brown hat trees, but that benefit quickly becomes a drawback. The fungus increases the inherent magic a brown hat tree can cast, providing them access to spells one level higher than they can normally cast. However, their magic eventually becomes unreliable.

While very rare, it is possible for the fungus to infect other creatures aside from brown hats, if they ingest enough of the fungus. Any creature infected by Mage's Bane who is capable of spellcasting gains the following trait:

Mage's Bane Curse. Each morning roll a d10. On a 1, the infected creature loses access to all spells until the following dawn. On a 10, the infected creature gains access to a spell slot one level higher than its highest casting level, or an additional 9th-level spell slot if it already has access to 9th-level spells. For example, a wizard capable of casting 3rd-level spells would gain one 4th-level spell slot. The spell slot remains until the creature takes a long rest.

BROWN HAT SEEDLING SWARM

Tiny plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 22 (5d8)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Vulnerabilities acid

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages -

Challenge ½ (100 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a tiny plant. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Stings. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half its hit points or fewer.

BROWN HAT

Small plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 7 (2d6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Damage Vulnerabilities acid

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, fire, piercing

Damage Immunities cold

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Skills Athletics +5

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Sylvan

Challenge ¼ (50 XP)

Pack Tactics. The brown hat has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the brown hat's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally is not incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (2d4 - 1) slashing damage.



CARSUS

BROWN HAT TREE (CYCLOPSIS PHRUNNUSCAPPUS)

Huge plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)
Hit Points 243 (18d12 + 126)
Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	4 (-3)	24 (+7)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Perception +6, Persuasion +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, fire, piercing

Damage Immunities cold

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion

Senses tremorsense 160 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Sylvan, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

False Appearance. While Carsus remains motionless, he is indistinguishable from a normal tree.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Carsus fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. Carsus regains 10 hit points at the start of his turn. If he takes acid damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn. Carsus dies only if he starts his turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Unreliable Magic. Due to an aggressive fungal infection, Carsus's magic is slightly unreliable, but occasionally more potent. Every morning roll a d10. On a 1, Carsus loses access to all spells until the following dawn. On a 2, he loses his 2nd-level slots, on a 3, he loses his 3rd-level slots, on a 4, he loses his 4th-level spell slots, and on a 5, he loses his 5th-level spell slots. A result of 6 to 9 has no effect. If a 10 is rolled, Carsus gains access to one 6th-level spell slot for the day.

Spellcasting. Carsus is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). He requires no material components to cast spells. He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, mending, produce flame, shillelagh*

1st level (4 slots): *entangle, fog cloud, healing word, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *flaming sphere, hold person, spike growth*

3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning, dispel magic, plant growth*

4th level (3 slots): *blight, ice storm, wall of fire*

5th level (2 slots): *insect plague, wall of stone*

ACTIONS

Branch Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target.

Hit: 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage.

Telepathic Control. Carsus targets one humanoid within 30 feet of him that he can see. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed for 1 day. The charmed target obeys Carsus's telepathic commands. If the target suffers any harm or receives a command that could result in harm to itself, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. If the target successfully saves against the effect or if the effect on it ends, the target is immune to Carsus's Telepathic Control for the next 24 hours. Carsus may have up to four targets charmed at once. If he charms an additional target beyond this limit, the effect on his first target ends.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Carsus can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Carsus regains spent legendary actions every turn.

Branch Slam. Carsus makes an attack with his Branch Slam.

Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Actions). Carsus casts a spell from his list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.



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